



Director's Monthly Message: Janel L. Forde

October is perhaps the time of year most associated with the results of the year's labor – it fits with the activities we see in farm fields all around us as the weather begins to change. The crop harvest, stewardship of resources, and early preparation for the year ahead. For farmers or business owners or State workers, there is little or no time to rest before we think about what we need to do next. And the importance of the Fall season in government parallels with efforts in private life both on the farm and in business to take time as the year winds down to assess our results, celebrate our successes, and above all, understand and use what we have learned to plan for a better future.

As the Pritzker administration team enters our 10th month in doing the work of CMS, we look at October as a time to assess our achievements to date – the things we have worked hardest to get done over the year – like improving CMS processes and services, bringing new, skilled people on board to scale up our capacity to serve, promoting dedicated CMS employees to new and exciting roles, and delivering on our commitments to our customers, mainly the citizens of Illinois and the State agencies that serve them most directly. In short, October is a time to assess what has been done, and what is yet to be done, to achieve the goals we set for ourselves back when the winter winds were howling.

As our Employee of the Month for October 2019, Yolanda Washington, so aptly puts it: **Teamwork makes the dream work...** and this year, as in most years we can point to the efforts of our teams – all of us working together in many ways, really – as a common denominator for our successes. As Yolanda puts it, none of us can be successful on our own. We need diversity, we need differing sources of knowledge, and we need to work together to apply that knowledge as we move forward together.

It has been said that opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work. This analogy elicits an image of farm work,

but the lesson here applies to all businesses and to all of us in government as we assess achievements, look at ways to build on those achievements, determine strategies and make budgets fit those strategies while preserving the precious resources we receive from taxpayers to do the public's work. Thus, we must remain as committed as a farmer to his or her crops, or to that bottom line that determines how other business people must respond every day in order to meet the responsibility to customers depending on certain services.

We in government must maintain the same disciplined mindset for serving the agencies and people who count on us. What is our mandate for service by law? What are the expectations and needs of the public in serving them as required by law? What have we done that is good and can be built upon? What are we doing that adds no value and should be changed or eliminated? How can we best determine levels of customer satisfaction and customer feedback that can best inform our future policy decisions? And how do we establish the kinds of performance measures that enable us in government to replicate successes and improve on the things that could be more successful?

At CMS, we are committed to a wide range of goals that are based mainly on improved process efficiencies and reduced process waste, and on establishing a factual and clear view of our goals and objectives and the efforts needed to achieve those, both for the long term and the immediate term. This approach requires teamwork and an abiding team orientation that requires us to ask the tough questions, accept the difficult answers, and then depend on each other even more to make the changes needed to succeed and build on our successes in the future. This is what October means in State government. It is a time to re-energize, be thankful, and focus on improvement whether we work on the farm or other small business, or in government.

Together, we can always make things better.

What is FOIA all about?

By Robert Osgood, Senior Counsel and FOIA Officer for CMS

Each employee of State government has a responsibility to know and abide by the laws on information that may be privileged or confidential based on sensitive policy decisions and negotiations. Such decisions, contract bids, or other negotiations can be compromised or undermined if certain confidential information is made public at the wrong time.

The key question for State workers is much more basic:

Do you know what FOIA is and how important it is to your job?

Put simply, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) is an important tool for the public and government to help secure a legal ruling on what information can and cannot be released to the public at a given time, based on applicable law. It is helpful for all State workers to understand FOIA, and how it is applied.

OVERVIEW

The general theme of FOIA is that all records in the possession of a public body are open to the public unless subject to one or more exemptions. There are more than 40 categorical exemptions, and almost as many statutory exemptions, for instance, where another law limits disclosure. These exemptions allow public agencies to withhold a wide range of information, such as some personal information, draft documents and internal discussions, pending procurements, and certain labor and personnel records. However, these exemptions are narrowly construed, meaning that courts tend to favor open disclosure. Personal privacy only extends so far for government employees and may not apply to certain information. If information bears on a public employee's public duties, then the information is not private. Because of this, things like salaries, timesheets, and personnel files cannot be withheld.

TAKEAWAY

All employees should assume that all information they input or handle for State work is or could be subject to FOIA.

BACKGROUND

Modeled after the federal Freedom of Information Act, Illinois' first iteration of FOIA was passed in 1984. In 2010, a sweeping amendment to FOIA was passed, which,

among other things, created the Public Access Counselor to mediate FOIA disputes and reduced the agencies' length of time to respond from seven days to just five days.

TAKEAWAY

All employees are responsible for reporting any potential FOIA request to the CMS FOIA Officer immediately upon receiving it, even if they are not sure FOIA action is required. Send any potential FOIA request to Legal immediately as formal responses are required within five days of receipt.

IN PRACTICE

As in most things concerning government, it helps to know and understand the law. Anyone needing assistance or information on what kinds of requests FOIA does or does not cover should contact the CMS FOIA Officer as soon as they receive such a request. **Once we receive it anywhere in CMS, we are "on the clock" for a response, and five days go by quickly, so coordination and teamwork is essential in upholding our responsibilities with public information.**

Anyone in the agency receiving a FOIA request must immediately forward that request to the CMS FOIA Officer, Robert Osgood. A request does not have to state that it is a "FOIA request" to trigger the law. Any request for records may be considered a FOIA request. As mentioned above, we have a short period of time within which to respond, and failure to do so constitutes a denial and opens the agency to a public appeal to the Attorney General's Office, a lawsuit, or both. Failure to respond on time also limits the agency's ability to charge copying fees or treat the request as unduly burdensome.

CMS receives a wide variety of requests. Some are routine, like someone wanting to know which vendor was awarded a contract. Other requests can be voluminous,



If you have any questions about FOIA or want to know how to get formal FOIA training, contact the CMS FOIA Officer, Robert Osgood at robert.osgood@illinois.gov

What is FOIA all about? *Continued*

for example someone requesting 30 years of records or thousands of emails. In such instances, FOIA allows us to ask the requester to narrow their request to more manageable proportions. Additionally, the burden of producing the records must outweigh the public's interest before we can deny the request as unduly burdensome. So, even though something might be burdensome, if the public interest is great enough, we may still be required to provide some or all of the requested information.

A FINAL WORD OF CAUTION ON FOIA

While State email and cell phone records are subject to being produced under FOIA, one may not realize that their personal device may also be subject to FOIA if they are conducting public business on it. A recent example from Champaign involved city council members texting and

emailing each other during a city council meeting. The City was required to provide the records from city council members' personal phones.

TAKEAWAY

Only use your State-issued work phones and devices for State work, not your personal phones or devices.

Teamwork, solid communications, and quick action are essential in meeting the stringent FOIA standards. Work closely with supervisors and the CMS FOIA Officer as needed to ensure timely handling of these document or information requests in order to meet requirements under the law as soon as possible.

Safety Corner – SECA Charities

Safety is an important part of all our lives, which includes preparing for emergencies and using proper equipment at work. Additionally, safety can be about helping others live a safe life. The State and University Employees Combined Appeal (SECA) is the yearly opportunity for employees to donate to charitable causes of their choice. A few charities focused on safety are described here to show ways you can support improving the quality of life for those in your community, throughout Illinois, and across the nation.



Guide Dogs for the Blind

Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB) creates partnerships between people, dogs, and communities. Their work prepares highly qualified guide dogs to serve and empower individuals who are blind or have low vision



For more information about this year's SECA campaign, please go to secaillinois.org or, to make a direct contribution, go to seca.healthcharities.stratuslive.com

from throughout the United States and Canada. All of the services GDB offers are provided free of charge. The support of a guide dog affords visually impaired people increased mobility as well as confidence, companionship, and independence. Find out more about this charity at guidedogs.com.

Kids in Danger

Kids in Danger (KID) is dedicated to protecting children by fighting for product safety. KID staff members fight for the safety of all children by enhancing transparency and accountability through safer product development, better education about product safety, and stronger advocacy to protect children. KID's work was essential in passing Danny's Law as part of the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act (CPSIA) in 2008. This law requires standards for products used by juveniles, bans lead and other harmful substances, and mandates independent testing for most children's products. Based in Chicago, KID has been instrumental in protecting the safety of children everywhere. Find out more about this charity at kidsindanger.org.



Environment Illinois

Environment Illinois understands that living in a safe world means protecting our environment. According to the Environment Illinois website, the organization believes there is something special about Illinois — something worth protecting and preserving for future generations. Whether it's the light shimmering off Lake Michigan, the wild beauty of the Illinois and other rivers, or the rolling hills of the Galena area, the natural wonders of Illinois enrich our lives in countless ways. One way the organization works to protect Illinois is through its litigation project which protects the water we drink and the air we breathe by holding polluters accountable. Find out more about this charity at environmentillinois.org.

Courage Connection

Courage Connection is all about safety, support, and success. They work with individuals and families facing domestic violence and provide services in order to preserve the safety that they need. In FY 2018, Courage Connection helped more than 1,550 people, which included providing emergency shelter for more than 250 people in need, and supporting some 200 orders of protection from the courts. Based in the Champaign-Urbana area, this organization began as a grassroots, volunteer-run response to local needs and has found a community with a deep commitment to its most vulnerable members. Find out more about this charity at courageconnection.org.

DID YOU KNOW?

SECA was established in 1983.

State of Illinois employees have since contributed more than \$82 million to charities at local, state, national and international levels.

ALL donations through SECA go directly to the charity of your choice.

Last year, CMS employees contributed to 33 different charities.

Happening Around CMS



We celebrated the end of Laps-A-Palooza with breakfast, new hats, and lots of smiles.

The State of Illinois' fiscal period ends on June 30th; however, the State does not receive all of the invoices for goods and services it acquired by July 1, which is the day a new budget goes into effect.

The "Lapse period" is a time frame for the State to pay any outstanding bills from a recently expired fiscal year. The deadline for agencies to submit lapse period vouchers to the Comptroller was Aug. 31st. CMS worked diligently to complete all vouchers to meet this year's deadline.

It was an incredible undertaking and the team skillfully processed 104,739 invoices at \$6.3 billion for FY 2019.

Employee of the Month: Yolanda Washington



When **Yolanda Washington** heard she was being awarded the CMS Employee of the Month honor for October 2019, she was quick to put things into perspective. “First, it is a tremendous compliment and honor to receive recognition like this,” she said, “but I want everyone to know it is humbling because I know that the hard work of my amazing team is the whole reason I can be recognized. There is no way I could be successful without them. So, I consider this a recognition for all of us, and I want to congratulate my team on their success. ... Teamwork makes the dream work, it’s as simple as that!”

Yolanda has served as the **CMS Facility Manager** for the James R. Thompson Center (JRTC) for a year, and her ability to anticipate needs and to organize or coordinate responses as seamlessly as possible, always with a smile, are among the reasons she earned the recognition. Yolanda’s insistence on sharing credit and lifting her team into the spotlight with her illustrates a primary reason CMS leadership recognized Yolanda for her work.

“Yolanda performs her daily tasks with a smile on her face and is always ready to provide a warm greeting to building occupants,” including her own staff, said **Anthony Pascente, CMS Chief of Staff**. “We appreciate her hard work and the effort that she exhibits each day as the JRTC Facility Manager. Her dedication to work, desire to find new ways to achieving goals, and overall cheerfulness is always welcomed.”

Yolanda’s job makes her the face of CMS for many agency tenants at JRTC, and her duties revolve around all aspects of the operation of the facility, including upkeep, maintenance, tenant questions and issues, service organization, and general troubleshooting, much of which is unpredictable and requires an ability to adapt

immediately to situations at hand. Her extended team of 29 consists of her direct staff of five, which includes the chief engineer, plus the building’s assistant chief engineer, stationary engineers, trade staff, maintenance staff and other physical plant staff. “Coordination can be challenging, but we have some very skilled people on staff and they know what they’re doing, so we can rely on each other,” she said.

In addition to the people she works for and with at JRTC, Yolanda says the variety of activities and duties within her job makes every day enjoyable to her. “Actually, one of the things I love most about my job is that I haven’t had a repeat day since I’ve been here,” she says. “Every day is different, and I love the variety of challenges we face, and I love working with my team to figure out the best responses and how we can work together to make these things happen as quickly and seamlessly as possible.”

Life as the facility manager at JRTC “is never boring, and I look at it as being given an opportunity to learn every day,” she adds. “You just never know what the next call will be – you have to be ready for anything.” “Anything” can encompass a wide range of problems – water dripping from one floor onto offices below, for instance, or a tenant issue over space usage, or a procurement issue for the building, or a technical or equipment problem, or even wild animals loose in the complex.

“I think one of the most unique problems we’ve seen was when we got a call that there was a bat flying around in the 11th floor offices,” Yolanda says with a chuckle. “That was an anomaly to say the least. I’m not sure how a bat even gets in the building and into the offices at that level, let alone how to catch it and get it out of the building. But we got the team together and figured it out – we did get the bat out of the building safely and humanely.”

Yolanda came to CMS after two years at the **Department of Human Services**, where she worked on a multitude of support and service issues, including social services career training and rehabilitation coordination. That experience helped her hone her problem-solving instincts, coordination routines, and her already excellent people skills. “Managing a facility like this one is a tremendous challenge, and I’m learning every day, but mostly we love the problem solving, and the team loves working on these things together. We learn things together and apply what we have learned as we go.”

Noteworthy October Observations



Breast Cancer Awareness Month

LGBTQ History Month

National Cyber Security Awareness Month

Oct. 7: National Diversity Day

Oct. 10: World Mental Health Day

Oct. 14: Columbus Day

Oct. 14: Indigenous Peoples' Day

October is



**LGBTQ
HISTORY
MONTH**

Illinois Events

Oct. 5: Marion Rotary Fall Classic 5K/10K

4:30pm, 2000 S Carbon St., Marion, IL

<https://runsignup.com/Race/IL/Marion/RotaryFamilyFunNight5k>

Oct. 12: Halloween Hustle 5K

10:00am – 2:00pm, Fifth St. and Sangamon Ave., Springfield

<https://runsignup.com/Race/IL/Springfield/HelpingHandsHalloweenHustle5K>

Oct. 12: Fairgrounds Fall Festival

11:00am – 6:00pm, 10826 IL-71, Yorkville, IL

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/fairgrounds-fall-fest-tickets-65374441715>

Oct. 12 – 13: 50th Annual Burgoo Festival

La Salle County Historical Museum, 101 E Canal St., North Utica, IL

<https://www.lasallecountyhistoricalsociety.org/event-info/50th-annual-burgoo-festival>

Oct. 14: State Holiday – Columbus Day

Oct. 20: Oktoberfest Rotary Run

1:00pm, Union Park, 1750 General Electric Rd., Bloomington, IL

<https://runsignup.com/Race/IL/Bloomington/OktoberfestRotaryRun>

Oct. 26: Main Street Pumpkin Festival

10:00am – 3:00pm, Downtown Jacksonville, IL

<https://www.jacksonvillemainstreet.com/pumpkin-festival>

Oct. 26 - 27: Dark History & Horror Convention

The City Center, 503 S Chestnut St., Champaign, IL

<http://www.dhhcon.com/>

Oct. 29 - 30: Illinois Digital Government Summit

Crowne Plaza Springfield - Convention Center, 3000 S. Dirksen Pkwy.

<https://events.govtech.com/illinois-digital-government-summit.html>



State of Illinois
Central Management Services

CMS

Illinois Department of
Central Management Services

Office of the Acting Director
Janel L. Forde
(217) 782-2141

For more information on this newsletter or any other CMS initiatives, contact:

Mike Deering • Public Information Officer: (312) 814-1676

Wendy Butler • Director of Governmental Affairs: (217) 785-1941